

Children's Needs in the Face of Violence

Here are a few guidelines that can help parents respond to the needs of their children when violence strikes close to home or in the news. The two main goals are to insulate children from adult anxiety and to provide a release for any anxiety they might have on their own.

Children need calm and capable caregivers – Children will tend to “mirror” the reactions of significant adults around them. Your calm coping with these events can set the emotional tone for your child to cope as well. If you are anxious and fearful in your own approach to your children, you may cause them more anxiety than the original event itself.

Children need assurance – Be prepared for a wide variety of responses from your child. Assure your child that their reaction is OK and they are normal. Communicate to your child that any feelings they may or may not have around these events are normal and OK with you. If your child responds in an aggressive or uncaring manner, it can be a good opportunity to help them explore those feelings and find healthy ways to express them.

Children need predictability – It is important that you help your child know what to expect for their future and to answer any questions or concerns they might have about changes in their world caused by violent acts. Maintaining stability and routine can help children cope.

Children need safe and secure surroundings – Limit the viewing of TV and carefully consider monitoring your conversation around your children. It is important not to “re-traumatize” children with repeated ruminations of the problems of violence. These problems are adult problems and it is not up to your children to solve them.

Children need love and support – Make sure you or other important people are there to support your children should violence erupt. A caring adult should be available to them at all times should they need individual attention. Knowing they have access to you or another adult anytime they may need help can give them the support they need.

Children need a range of self-control and choice – Trauma involves more than the threat of emotional or physical injury, it is about the lack of control. Children need to have a range of choices for themselves at all times which allow them the freedom to control what they can control in their lives. Children do not need to be burdened with decisions about their own safety in the face of violence. That is the job of their parents and teachers.

Children need hope – Help to fit these events into a “new normal.” Remind children, while some things have changed as a result of a violent act, there are still a lot of things that have not changed. Making plans for future events they can participate in and look forward to can help give them the reassurance they need.

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Important: *These are general recommendations and guidelines for educational purposes only and may not apply to your specific situation. If you have any questions or concerns or if you notice anything out of the ordinary in your child's behavior or anything that interferes with their normal everyday activities, it is important to seek a consultation with a professional.*